

Before stating my suggestions for changes to the City Charter, I believe the charter commission needs to have a mailing address that is advertised at frequent intervals on TV and in the paper, for the benefit of everyone. These public meetings draw relatively small crowds and thus get limited input from the majority of the citizens. ~~Also, I could find no link on my computer that would bring up the current city charter to peruse.~~ *MANY DO NOT*

USE COMPUTERS

REGARDING CITY CHARTER REVISIONS:

As evident over past, and especially recent, years, there are many reasons why the charter needs revising, mostly as a result of malfeasance in office by our elected and appointed officials, both local and state, or by misuse of public funds. Specific examples of misuse of funds are the Pyramid, Mud Island, and the FED-EX FORUM. The taxpayers simply must have more say in the operation of the city government and how their taxes are spent. The charter needs to be very specific by stating clearly what the mayor and the city council can and cannot do in many situations. Some suggestions listed randomly [and perhaps previously made by others]

are:

1. Provide a charter that is written in layman's language, as opposed to any legalese.
2. Provide specific language so that there is no room for ambiguity, or doubt as to its interpretation.
3. Be certain any changes do not conflict with State or Federal law, to eliminate any possibility of a challenge in court, and thus avoid lengthy and costly litigation.
4. Show plain old common sense, something that is lacking in many local and state laws.
5. Limit the authority of the mayor and city council in making appointments and expenditures that are not directly and obviously beneficial to the city and taxpayers. Justify the appointments and major expenditures in writing, and provide a written job description of all elected and appointed positions.
6. Direct the mayor and city council to operate on an austere budget at all times, unless there is a bonifide emergency, to avoid needless spending.
7. Make the charter available on the internet [if not already done].
8. Provide for a review of the charter every 6-8 years so that changes proposed by a citizens' initiative, the mayor or city council, can be put on a referendum ballot during the earliest regular general election.
9. Provide specific sanctions for malfeasance and ethical violations in office by both elected and appointed persons, including the possibility of dismissal.
10. Define "conflict of interest" clearly. Some current officials do not seem to understand what a "conflict of interest" comprises.
11. Prohibit anyone with a prior felony conviction from holding public office, either elected or appointed [if the law permits this for elected positions].
12. Specify the number of appointed positions that the mayor and city council are

12. Specify the number of appointed positions that the mayor and city council are authorized to make, with oversight by the council and salaries approved by the council.
13. Set the salaries of the mayor and city council members, and require a referendum to make any increases, or to change the current pension system for city employee, including elected or appointed.
14. Require that the issue of any bonds [both general obligation and revenue] must pass a referendum vote at a general election.
- 15.. Authorize citizens' initiatives that can be presented every general election and put on a referendum ballot, and reduce the required number of citizens' signatures to a more reasonable number than is now required [say 5% of the last voting numbers instead of the current percentage.
16. Provide term limits for the mayor and city council members. Eight years should be enough.
17. Require a referendum for any property tax increases, and only at a general election year.
18. Remove the city from any responsibility in lawsuits arising from malfeasance, sexual harrasments, and other offences by city employees [including elected and appointed] where the employee is soley responsible for his/her actions and city policies have been violated by him/her, and provide no litigation funds for him/her.
19. Require a "CARMEN MIRANDA" type statement that all city employees must read and sign, including elected and appointed persons, so that they are fully aware of the consequences of any of their actions that are contrary to city policy, and are thus soley responsible for any costs of any suits, and not the city.
20. Limit the time that a former city employee has , when re-employed, to one year between employments, in order to grandfather in his /her previous years with the city.

The above changes may seem excessively stringent, but they provide the only way the taxpayers can have adequate control over city government, which is sorely needed. None of the above should prevent the mayor or city council members from performing the jobs they were elected to do, nor tie their hands excessively. It will just make them more responsible to the taxpayers, and to do the right thing. A city charter with such inclusions may even become a model for other cities.

R. S. Phillips
428 Elwood Lane
Memphis, TN 38117
685-6396